



**Illinois Nutrient Research
& Education Council**

STRATEGIC PLAN

2016 – 2021

AUGUST 16, 2016
KERBER, ECK & BRAECKEL LLP | 1 WEST OLD STATE CAPITOL PLAZA
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background: Created in 2012 by [Public Act 97-0960](#), the Illinois Nutrient Research & Education Council (NREC) is Illinois agriculture's commitment to enhance nutrient utilization, increase crop production and protect water quality. It is funded through an assessment amount per ton of fertilizer sold and managed by a Council of representatives from farm organizations, commercial fertilizer, specialty fertilizer, the Illinois Department of Agriculture, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and representatives of environmental organizations.

In 2016, the Council initiated a strategic planning process to prioritize transparency and accountability as it continues to transition to a more mature organization that funds research projects and education programs. Kerber, Eck & Braeckel LLP (KEB), a management consulting firm based in Springfield, facilitated the planning process.

The process began with a strategic planning retreat. The Council established priorities for the next three to five years and envisioned the ideal outcome of NREC's efforts. The Governance Committee then developed the strategic plan consistent with the Council's guidance and priorities.

One priority of the process and of the Council's strategic direction was to engage stakeholders, or those who have a direct interest in, who are affected by or who are integral to the implementation of NREC's strategy. A series of stakeholder conversations helped gain insight into the perceptions, desired communications and ideas of each industry group related to NREC's goals.

The planning process resulted in four goals covering three functional areas: operations, research and outreach. While some goals focus on internal operations, policies and procedures, all goals support the ultimate responsibility of being good stewards of public dollars to achieve the intent of the authorizing statute.

Following is the strategic plan outlining each goal, the approach to achieve each goal, specific steps to implement the plan and the resources required to launch and sustain each activity.

**THE NUTRIENT RESEARCH AND EDUCATION COUNCIL
STRATEGIC PLAN**

2016 – 2021

MISSION AND PURPOSE

- A. To pursue nutrient research and educational programs to ensure the adoption and implementation of practices that optimize nutrient use efficiency, ensure soil fertility, and address environmental concerns with regard to fertilizer use.
- B. To prioritize nutrient research and education needs and solicit research proposals to generate findings and make recommendations to the industry based on the findings.
- C. To evaluate the proposed budget for each project and make recommendations as necessary.
- D. To arrange for peer review of all proposals for scientific merit and methods.
- E. To report the findings of all research and education projects at industry conferences, and provide learning opportunities for certified crop advisors, crop production professionals, agricultural producers and other individuals associated with agriculture and agribusiness.
- F. To publish the findings and implement programs to apply the research recommendations in agricultural production systems and in consumer use markets where appropriate.
- G. To engage in outreach and field level trials and educational programs with growers and consumers, publicize these events and provide learning opportunities for the general population to ensure that our society understands the importance of nutrient utilization.
- H. Where practical, cooperate with other programs with similar goals.
- I. To promote a unified message on behalf of the NREC.
- J. To take any other actions consistent with Items A through I above.

VISION

Farmers and others who utilize fertilizer products adopt and implement best practices to optimize nutrient efficiency, maximize crop yields, and protect water quality by minimizing nutrient loss.

STRATEGIC PLAN OVERVIEW

PRIORITY ISSUES TO ADDRESS IN 3 TO 5 YEARS

TIMEFRAME	FUNCTIONAL AREA	PRIORITY ISSUE (GOAL)	APPROACH (OBJECTIVE)
IMMEDIATE	Operations	1. Systemize and standardize operations, including through policies and procedures	Clarify each NREC committee’s composition, duties, policies and procedures to improve efficiency and predictability of committee work, freeing the full Council to focus on bigger, strategic issues
SHORT TERM	Research Steering	2. Proactively seek viable research with potential to have a significant impact, both from an economic and an environmental standpoint; manage the reporting and evaluation of projects	Gather data, including from other states and surveys, to annually refine NREC priorities that guide the Research Committee in shaping RFPs for the next funding cycle
SHORT TERM AND ONGOING	Outreach	3. Effectively communicate NREC purpose, research findings and impact	Prioritize consumer-ready information that can be shared efficiently and effectively through technical assistance, industry journals and coordinated communication channels
LONG TERM AND ONGOING	Outreach	4. Track the adoption and implementation of practices, including through partnerships	Pursue more coordinated efforts and tracking of best practices, cognizant of the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy, by defining roles of organizations responsible for developing, implementing and measuring best management practices

Immediate – August 2016 to December 2016

Long term – August 2016 to August 2019

Short term – August 2016 to August 2017

Ongoing – Starting now and becoming routine

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENTS AND DEFINITIONS

COMPONENTS	DEFINITIONS
Critical Issue	The “what needs to be addressed”
Strategic Goal	The “what” we want to achieve to address the critical issue.
Objective	The approach for achieving that goal.
Tactics	The “how,” or an activity that can be measured to determine whether we are meeting our goal.
Human Resources Required	The estimated hours or capacity needed to launch and maintain each activity.
Financial Resources Required	The estimated cost of this activity and potential funding sources that could cover that cost.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR ACTIVITIES IN THE FIRST THREE YEARS

	MAJOR ACTIVITIES	STRATEGIC AREA
Year 1 (August 2016 – August 2017)		
1.	Revise committee descriptions, policies, procedures; revamp orientation	Operations
2.	Set parameters for Research Committee composition and procedures	Operations
3.	Develop a succession plan for essential staff and Council functions	Operations
4.	Make recommendations to the Research Committee about research priorities based on stakeholder input	Research Steering
5.	Establish a research funding policy	Research Steering
6.	Prioritize innovative and collaborative research projects	Research Steering
7.	Consider investing in research data management software	Research Steering
8.	Convene an initial conversation about clarifying roles of organizations involved in best management practices and next steps of NASS results	Outreach
Year 2 (August 2017 – August 2018)		
9.	Catalogue research topics and results as a resource for the future	Research Steering
10.	Annually designate a proportion of funds for projects proposing to provide education or technical assistance	Outreach
11.	Develop supports for researchers to publish their findings in peer-reviewed journals and/or prepare consumer-ready results	Outreach
12.	Define NREC’s role in disseminating information within NREC’s scope relevant to unique crop weather seasons (ongoing after year 2)	Outreach
Year 3 (August 2018 – August 2019)		
13.	Update the succession plan for essential staff and Council functions	Operations
14.	Revisit the conflict of interest policy and other policies to identify adjustments needed	Operations
15.	Revisit the Research Committee’s scoring criteria and procedures to assess the need for any adjustments	Research Steering
Ongoing (Starting in August 2016 and becoming routine)		
16.	Maintain the succession plan for essential staff and Council functions	Operations
17.	Periodically review NREC statute and bylaws	Operations
18.	Seek and gather information about research concepts from a variety of stakeholders and sources; make recommendations to the Research Committee about research priorities	Research Steering
19.	Regularly seek stakeholder input as part of the communications/marketing plan	Outreach
20.	Continue to support statewide producer practice surveys in partnership with other interested entities	Outreach

**THE ILLINOIS NUTRIENT RESEARCH AND EDUCATION COUNCIL
STRATEGIC PLAN AUGUST 2016 – AUGUST 2021**

Immediate = August 2016 to December 2016 (9 months)
Short-term = August 2016 to August 2017 (18 months)
Long-term = August 2016 to August 2019 (3 to 5 years)
Ongoing = Starting now and becoming routine

1. OPERATIONS (IMMEDIATE)		
Priority Issue	Systemize and standardize operations, including through policies and procedures	
Objective	Clarify each NREC committee’s composition, duties, policies and procedures to improve efficiency and predictability of committee work, freeing the full Council to focus on bigger, strategic issues	
Tactic 1: Revise all committee descriptions, policies, procedures, and define Council and committee composition		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise and approve all committee descriptions • Define committee policies and procedures • Define the RFP processes • Define Council and committee composition, appointment process, terms and annual composition review • Enhance new member orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance Committee • Other applicable committees • Research coordinator • Executive director 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Tactic 2: Set parameters for Research Committee composition and procedures to ensure transparency and accountability		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine scoring criteria • Review voting procedures • Consider instituting categories of research • Revise the conflict of interest policy • Review the conflict of interest policy annually to determine whether changes are needed based on actual practices and implications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance Committee, Research Committee and executive director time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal fees

1. OPERATIONS (IMMEDIATE)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft procedures for disclosing a conflict of interest and granting a waiver • Establish expectations and methods of ethics training for non-Council committee members • Consider other processes to reinforce the Research Committee’s work from being rehashed in Council meetings 		
Tactic 3: Develop and maintain a succession plan to cover essential staff and Council functions (ongoing)		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compile all policies, procedures, job descriptions and organizational documents in a single location (electronic version and paper version) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify all financial and administrative accounts used by the executive director ○ Create a calendar of monthly activity and deadlines for the executive director and key Council positions ○ Identify essential functions that must be performed in the executive director’s or key councilor’s absence and transitional staffing plan for how to cover each function ○ Identify cross-training needs among councilors and staff to perform essential functions in the absence of the executive director or key councilor ○ Identify communications protocol in an executive director or key councilor absence or transition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Director • Key councilors; e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ NREC chair ○ Research coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Tactic 4: Periodically review NREC statute and bylaws to ensure the structure enables the Council to effectively achieve its purpose (ongoing)		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct an annual review of the bylaws • Conduct an annual review of state statute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal fees, as needed

2. RESEARCH STEERING (SHORT-TERM)		
Priority Issue	Proactively seek viable research with potential to have a significant impact, both from an economic and an environmental standpoint; manage the reporting and evaluation of projects	
Objective	Gather data, including from other states and surveys, to annually refine NREC priorities that guide the Research Committee in shaping RFPs for the next funding cycle	
Tactic 1: Seek and gather information about research concepts from a variety of stakeholders and sources, and make recommendations about priority research areas for the Research Committee’s consideration		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek ideas for research priorities from periodic stakeholder conversations • Research best management practices in other states • Review NREC research priorities in relation to NLRS; identify practices that need more exploration and data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance Committee • Research Committee • Executive director 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consulting fees for facilitation of initial stakeholder conversations
Tactic 2: Establish a research funding policy to guide NREC determinations of project awards and timelines		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set parameters of projects that NREC funds and does not fund without special consideration • Revise the timing of RFP research awards considering stakeholder input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance Committee • Research Subcommittee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Tactic 3: Prioritize innovative and collaborative research projects to reduce duplicative efforts and to build on existing research and infrastructure of projects		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize in RFPs the desire for innovative, collaborative research proposals • Ensure scoring criteria awards bonus points to proposals that describe innovative and collaborative efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Subcommittee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

2. RESEARCH STEERING (SHORT-TERM)		
Tactic 4: Catalogue research topics and results as a resource for the future		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review past meeting minutes to summarize funding decisions by major project types • Track funding decisions by major project type; identify trends/consistencies in past research project approvals • Develop a vision for “long-term research location/farm” for multi-year projects and coordinated projects • Develop a protocol for the Research Committee to elevate questions to the full Council regarding funding decisions by project type • Identify criteria by which previous research projects funded by NREC will be evaluated to help review future proposals by the same or similar entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Subcommittee • Potential research data management software • Potential project management software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research data management software: \$1,000 to \$10,000 • Project management software: Monthly fee per user between \$10 and \$50 per month, or \$120 and \$600 per year; free programs are widely available

3. OUTREACH (SHORT-TERM)		
Priority Issue	Effectively communicate NREC’s purpose, research findings and impact	
Objective	Prioritize consumer-ready information that can be shared efficiently and effectively through technical assistance, industry journals and coordinated communication channels	
Tactic 1: Annually designate a proportion of funds for projects proposing to provide education or technical assistance to those who will either adopt or who will facilitate the adoption of best practices		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revamp the NREC Outreach and Education Committee, prioritizing a collaborative approach to outreach • Seek recommendations from the Outreach and Education Committee for developing requests for proposals (RFPs) focused on a specific scope of work related to education or technical assistance projects • Obtain Council approval of designating up to 10% of research funds annually for education or technical assistance projects, with any unobligated funds diverting back to research each funding cycle • Manage NREC outreach efforts in collaboration with the Outreach and Education Committee (See Goal 4, Tactic 1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach and Education Committee • Executive director 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 10% of funds designated for research • Outreach efforts per annual communications plan budget
Tactic 2: Develop supports for researchers to publish their findings in peer-reviewed journals and prepare consumer-ready results to augment NREC communications and marketing		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a range of supports, criteria and procedures for offering supports to researchers • Define and develop a summary description with examples of “consumer-ready results” to provide to researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Subcommittee • Research coordinator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unknown, pending incentives
Tactic 3: Define NREC’s role in disseminating information within NREC’s scope relevant to unique crop weather seasons		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify ready-to-go packages of NREC information from NREC’s archives/research data management system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach and Education Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

3. OUTREACH (SHORT-TERM)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a communications protocol specific to extraordinary or emergency circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive director 	
Tactic 4: Regularly seek stakeholder input as part of the communications/marketing plan segmented by industry or type of group		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct periodic stakeholder conversations with commodity groups, water utilities, fertilizer industry representatives and environmental interests to identify how to most effectively communicate with each industry Tap into the IFCA annual meeting survey of all crop advisors and the ICCA annual meeting to identify the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requests to receive and decipher research reports Requests for NREC research about specific topics Ways in which they use NREC research Percentage of advisors that use the NLRS in their advice and recommendations Regularly engage stakeholder groups in conversation about outreach and education efforts each is conducting; identify potential partnerships with NREC outreach and education efforts Annually develop and implement a communications / marketing plan to tailor communication to target audiences Develop a communications kit with ready-made materials that others can use to educate their constituents (e.g., webinars, PowerPoints, statement stuffers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive director 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outreach efforts per annual communications plan budget

4. OUTREACH (LONG-TERM)		
Priority Issue	Track the adoption, implementation and effectiveness of NLRs practices and other potential best practices, including through partnerships	
Objective	Pursue more coordinated efforts and tracking of best practices, cognizant of the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy, by defining roles of organizations responsible for developing, implementing and measuring best management practices	
Tactic 1: Convene key individuals with decision-making responsibility for an initial conversation about clarifying roles of each organization involved in best management practices in an effort to achieve efficiencies and synergies		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene an initial conversation with applicable groups around the availability of NASS survey results to discuss next steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify each group’s primary function, including research, education or outreach related to best practices ○ Illustrate the relationship between all applicable groups in a flow chart to reflect “what is” ○ Discuss “what should be” in a collaborative approach to efficiently and effectively work toward a common goal • Seek recommendations from the Outreach and Education Committee for utilizing existing capacities and resources to communicate the adoption, implementation and effectiveness of best practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Subcommittee • Outreach and Education Committee • Executive director 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unknown
Tactic 2: Continue to support statewide producer practice surveys in partnership with other interested entities; regularly obtain input (e.g., through complementary survey) from farm managers, crop advisers and other influencer groups regarding awareness and recommendations for preventing nutrient loss		
Tasks	Human Resources Required	Financial Resources Required
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initially, fund the USDA NASS survey as a baseline to track adoption of specific practices in future years • Identify information to share from survey results and NREC stakeholder outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive director • Research Subcommittee • IFCA survey • ICCA survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NASS survey funding of \$50,000 every two years

4. OUTREACH (LONG-TERM)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Utilize existing surveys of member organization or other stakeholders to gain direct access to such influencers as crop advisers, CCAs and farm managers• Develop a metric for examining the impact of research findings		